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ABSTRACT

Three studies explored the binary distinctions in research on literacies and gender. The first study sought to identify and describe any multiple subjectivities that might be interrelated with gender in the development of reading, writing, and orality. Participant informants were 10 adults enrolled in a graduate seminar entitled "Gender, Culture and Literacy." Data included participants' five "thought papers," questionnaires, and class projects. The two themes that emerged from data analysis were geography, and family background or parenting as influences on gender and the development of literacies. The second study identified additional influences on gender and culture in the development of literacies. Participants were seven graduate students. Data were similar to that in the first study. Results indicated that students' perceptions about gender and about self and identity varied by the biological sex of the participants. The third study investigated language patterns in classroom discussion when classes were composed primarily of African-American students. Subjects were students in a seventh-grade and an eighth-grade language arts class. Direct observations were made of the two classes for one and a half weeks. Interviews were also conducted. Two themes emerged--female dominance in class discussions and females' presence of authority. Findings suggest a wide range of influences that counted as context in determining the development and practice of literacies; and the multiple layers people possess and were positioned by were impossible to partial out. Investigators will need to turn their attention to identifying and describing the plethora of influences that interact with gender to impact reading and writing. (Contains 32 references.) (RS)

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Mitigating Influences in the Interrelationships Between the Development of Literacies and Gender

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Mitigating Influences in the Interrelationships Between the Development of Literacies and Gender

A plethora of articles and books have been written exploring the otologies and empistemologies of gender and literacies (i.e., orality or oral language, writing, and reading [Gee, 1990]). The literature that addressed gender as an influence on the development of literacies served as readings for the graduate seminar, "Gender, Culture and Literacy", including writings on gender and language (e.g., Coates, 1993; Tannen, 1994; Tromel-Plotz, 1991), gender and reading (e.g., Davies, 1989, 1993; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996), gender and literacy (e.g., Gilbert, 1991), and gender and writing (e.g., Duchien & Konopak, 1994).

In perusing this literature, however, we found unexplored issues. Although the majority of the research on gender and literacies has been conducted on the influence of gender on language, relatively few researchers have addressed the influences of culture or ethnicity when considering the interaction of gender and language (e.g., Bergvall, Bing & Freed, 1996; Gile, 1977; Johnson & Meinhof, 1997). Fewer still have considered culture or ethnicity as an influence on gendered reading and the development of literacies (e.g., Orellana, 1995; Rigg, 1985).

It should not be surprising then that few researchers have identified and investigated influences other than ethnicity or culture on gender and literacy development. Some investigators,

however, have observed that people are "multi-layered" (Weiler, 1988). For example, Swann (1988) noted that gender differences between the speech of women and men are not categorical, but vary with the context. Crawford (1995) also recognized these multi-layers. In a critique of the sex differences approach to research in gender and language, Crawford (1995) noted:

> The sex difference approach treats women as a global category. But women (and men) are located along other socially salient dimensions, too - - such as race, (dis)ability, sexuality, class, and age. Foregrounding sex as the only or most important difference moves these other dimensions to the background and contributes to the tendency to rely on simplistic explanations for observed differences (p. 7-8).

For various reasons, other researchers critiqued the persistence of men/women dichotomies or sex difference theory in characterizing language patterns. Some attributed these observed differences in discourse patterns to multiple subjectivities. For example, Bing and Bervall (1997) noted that, "There is considerable evidence that variables such as race, social class, culture, discourse function, and setting are as important as gender and not additive or easily separated" (p. 5).

Expanding the description of interactive influences on gender, Frazer (1989) identified social class as an important influence on females' discourses of gender roles. In her study of British adolescent girls' discussions about feminism, Frazer discovered that upper-class girls perceived that feminism undermined their power positions as members of a privileged class. It was the lower-class females who had the most to gain

changes in class, power, and place. In this study, social class was revealed as an influence on females' attitudes toward gender roles, and the language patterns displayed by students to articulate those attitudes. Frazer (1989) explains the results of her study by identifying additional influences on gender:

> I argue, too, that some discourses are more empowering than others: feminism is more empowering to women as women than, say, conservatism. However, women never are women simpliciter - - they are also classed, raced, aged, generationed, and so on (p. 282).

Treating women as a global category also has been problematic historically for a field used to analyze language - - feminism (Kaplan, 1992). Throughout the late 70s and early 80s, women of color objected to being grouped with European-American women as speaking in one voice. Kaplan (1992) described other groups of women who joined in this protest:

> Lesbians, older women, prostitutes, disabled women, "post-feminists", pornography advocates, and others articulated their alienation from a feminism, which they argued, failed them (p. 71).

Hence, feminist theory evolved to feminist theories. In the late 1990s, we acknowledge multiple feminisms, including Black feminism (Bucholtz, 1997), social feminism (Stanley & Wise, 1993), and lesbian feminism (Stanley & Wise, 1993), to name a few. These various positions allude to the idea that women do not all think alike. It should follow, then, that women do not all talk, read, or write alike. In the midst of this decade, Crawford (1995) writes:

> It is a mistake to assume that all women necessarily have much in common with each other simply because they are women. Women of color share with men of color - - and not with white women - - the lived experience of racism. Lesbians share the experiences of social invisibility, heterosexism, and homophobia with gay men and bisexual people of both sexes, not with heterosexual women (p. 7-8).

The theme of differences and commonalities is also present in recent investigations of men and language (e.g., Johnson & Meinhof, 1977). In one investigation, although adolescent males used more expletives than females, the setting (type of school, either co-educational or single sex) was associated with differences in the number of expletives boys used (de Klerk, 1977). (Males used fewer expletives in single-sex schools; the researcher concluded that the need to prove masculinity was not as great in such a setting). Similarly, in a study of males' talk on televised football, the informal setting and content of the talk was attributed to males' adaptation of a discourse genre (gossip) characterized as "women's talk" (Johnson & Finlay, 1997). The researchers concluded that men may use similar discursive strategies as women do to create solidarity within their own gender group.

Hence, if both men's and women's oral language has been influenced by factors like setting and class, then the development of other literacies (e.g., reading and writing) may also be similarly impacted. Single dichotomies (like Hispanic or European American, and male or female) seem limiting and inappropriate when characterizing influences on literacy

inappropriate when characterizing influences on literacy development. References to "women's reading" or "men's talk" appear to be overly simplistic and inaccurate.

Purpose

Given these readings, it seemed relevant to explore the limits of binary distinctions in research on literacies and gender. This paper reviews three investigations that were stimulated by these findings. Although two of these studies have been presented previously (Gritsavage, 1997; Guzzetti, 1997), one has never been disseminated (Kyle, 1997). In addition, these three studies have not been analyzed together, nor have they been related as a whole to the extant literature. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to review these studies that explore influences on gender and literacies.

Study One: Geography and Family Background as Influences on Gender and Literacies

The first study reviewed here is one conducted by Guzzetti (1996). The course readings like these, and through informal observations of participants' of their thought papers and projects in the second offering of the graduate seminar, "Gender, Culture and Literacy", led us to question the inclusive nature of the influences on literacy previously identified. When the course was titled the assumption was that it was inclusive - - identifying the most important influences on literacy development. What we perceived, however, was that other influences might be equally as germane to literacy development as

possibilities of additional influences on gender in the development of literacies. I sought to identify and describe any multiple subjectivities (like those described by sociolinguists in analyses of language) that might be interrelated with gender in the development of reading, writing, and orality.

Sample

Participant informants were 10 adults ranging in ages from their mid-twenties to mid-fifties who were enrolled in the second offering of my graduate seminar, "Gender, Culture and Literacy." This course was offered within the College of Education at Arizona State University, but was also cross-listed in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, department of Women's Studies. The purpose of the course was to stimulate participants to explore their literacy practices and influences on those practices as learners and as teachers. Those explorations were intended to serve as the basis for participants' reflective insights into the conditions that shaped their literacies as social practice.

Nine of these 10 participants were females. The one male, an Hispanic in his mid-50s who taught agriculture at a local community college, was the eldest. Fifty percent of the participants were Hispanic, including five females ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s, four of whom were elementary teachers. In addition, one female in her mid-twenties was bi-racial (African and Swedish), and was the only participant born and raised outside the United States, having grown up both in

racial (African and Swedish), and was the only participant born and raised outside the United States, having grown up both in Ghana and Sweden. The others were European American females in their 30s, 40s and 50s. All were preservice or inservice teachers or had teaching backgrounds, except for one Hispanic female who was a law librarian. Two of the European American females in their 50s had either been a nun or aspired to be a nun. Participants were about evenly divided in their origins, coming from urban or rural backgrounds.

The professor of record for this course (Guzzetti) is a European American female in her late 40s with an urban background, having been born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. This was my second offering of this course which is facilitated in a discussion format rather than teaching by lecture. During class, the professor sat at the table with her co-participants in gender, culture and literacy explorations, avoiding the "head of the table" position.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three sources of data triangulated the analysis. The first of these sources were the participants' five thought papers. These were written self-reflections on the course readings of 39 articles or book excerpts. These readings explored issues of gendered language (e.g., Tannen, 1992; 1994; Tromel-Plotz, 1991), gendered reading and literacies (e.g., Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Gilbert, 1989; 1991; Davies, 1989; 1993), feminist theories (e.g., Stone, 1994), and influences on literacy development, like

culture (e.g., Orellana, 1995; Rigg, 1985) and class (e.g., Weiler, 1988), as well as gendered interactions with text forms, including forms of text men have shown to use more than women, like electronic or post-typographical texts (e.g., Nielsen, 1994).

Also included in the thought papers were participants' responses to questions about their personal views of and experiences with feminisms, language, and literacies. For Paper One, students defined the constructs of gender and literacies, and reflected on their own interests in and experiences with gender and literacies. In Paper Two, participants examined how their language and discourse had been influenced by their gender, ethnicity, age, or class. In Paper Three, individuals wrote their literacy autobiographies. For Paper Four, participants reflected on their experience as a learner and as a teacher. In Paper Five, participants examined how culture and gender role expectations impacted their literacy development.

A second source of data were questionnaires designed by the professor and two graduate students. Six questions of the 10 asked participants to give demographic or descriptive information, like age, major, professional position, ethnicity, and geographical background (i.e., Midwest, East, West or Urban, rural, suburban). Four questions asked (in open-response format) for reactions to the course. For example, participants were asked how the seminar related to their backgrounds and goals, what impact the course had on their preconceptions, attitudes, or

The third source of data were participants' class projects. Most of these were written reports of interviews with family members and friends to obtain their literacy autobiographies. Individuals who chose this option compared their own development in literacies to those reported by their relatives or friends.

These triangulated data were analyzed by the methods of constant-comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this analysis, papers and projects were read and reread for reoccurring categories and themes. Questionnaires were analyzed for percentage tallies of demographic information and for patterns in responses across informants and within categories. Comments on questionnaires were compared to informants' remarks in their projects and thought papers.

These data were analyzed from a framework best exemplified by Bergvall, Bing and Freed (1997). This frame rejects simplistic and exclusive binary divisions as definitive and categorical ways of analyzing phenomenon. Instead, I used the perspective of multiple subjectivities, as well as a frame of social feminism (Stanley & Wise, 1993) to guide the analysis of my informants' written language about gender, culture, and literacy.

Findings

In this discussion, I present two themes that emerged from the data analysis. The two themes are geography, and family background or parenting, as interactive influences on gender and literacies. Although both geography and family background could be classified more generally as context, a perusal of the

literature shows these influences to be new and specified identifications of context. Bloom and Green (1991) cite the need for specificity in descriptions of what is meant by context in studies of literacies.

Geography and Ethnicity as Influences on Gender and Literacy

Three of the informants (one female in her 40s, one female in her 20s, and one male in his 50s) were Hispanics with rural Western backgrounds. Two of them described the paucity of literacy models and resources available to them during their formative years. Lydia (pseudonyms used for informants), in her class project, stated:

> "I was born in the small rural city of Casa Grande, Arizona on January 24, 1967. My ethnic background is Hispanic. I am second in line of four siblings and am the only female. Growing up female in a culture that strictly adheres to gender traditional roles certainly impacted my literacy development. I did not have multiple siblings that modeled reading as a common practice. Overall, our home environment was not print rich and available reading materials were minimal. I can recall a set of four Disney books, our encyclopedias, and a few other assorted books. Unlike Paul's family [her interviewee's family], my parents did not subscribe to any magazines, and while they had a subscription to the local newspaper, the Casa Grande Dispatch, they didn't always read it. I can remember seeing newspapers that were never opened."

A similar story was told by Don, who grew up in rural New Mexico. He interviewed his siblings (whose age ranges span 20 years) regarding their literacy development, enlisting their assistance in recalling influences on his and their literacy development. Since Spanish was his primary language, Don was subjected to the then-common practice of placing ESL students

back a grade when his family moved from San Francisco to New Mexico. He and most of his siblings recalled that there were not enough Hispanic teachers of either gender to serve as role models. He did, however, report that his reading development was influenced primarily by his teachers and the librarians in the small library of his home town. Don remembered that the teachers in the rural New Mexico schools tended to call on students to participate based more on ethnicity than on gender. Specifically, Don remembered that Anglo boys were called on more, particularly by female teachers who favored one or two students.

In describing the literacy resources available to him as a Hispanic male in a rural community, Don wrote:

> "All of us [siblings] recall that we did not have books to read at home as youngsters. Our first exposure to books was at school and the school library. However, our father did buy a World Book encyclopedia set and a typewriter for us. Instead of books, my parents and extended family used story telling - - cuentos. The oral family history was passed down this way. In school, little books were prominent in our literacy development. Later, comic books were purchased by my older family members. Titles were cowboy related...kid colt, hot rod and Black Hawks."

A third course participant, Esther, who described herself as an Hispanic from a rural background, noted in her questionnaire that the course reading that had the most impact on her was the one by Rigg (1985). This article tells the story of Petra, an Hispanic migrant worker, who with her husband, followed the crops from rural community to rural community. Rigg movingly describes how Petra's duties as a wife and a mother, and the cultural role expectations placed on her as an Hispanic woman, positioned her

as illiterate. For example, when literacy tutoring was offered to Petra, distracting conditions and role demands in her home prevented tutoring from taking place there, and she was unable to obtain dependable transportation from her sons. They considered it more important that she stay at home and prepare the tortillas for their supper.

Esther explained that this article had the most impact on her because "it hit close to home." She stated that she knew adults who could not read. Esther reported that it angered her that, "there are still so many illiterate adults."

Conversely, an Hispanic female who grew up in an urban environment described her literacy development as influenced by family role models within a more print-rich environment than those informants of her culture from rural backgrounds. She wrote:

> "From the time I was very little, I remember my mother hurrying up to finish her housework so that she would have time to sit and read a novela or check the daily newspaper out for interesting happenings. As she was a stay at home mom, much of her time was spent on taking care of the needs of our family, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc. Neither mom nor dad had a public library card until about 15 years ago, although we lived quite close to the main city library. Again, perhaps because they had not had a lot of time to spend to visit the library to check out and to return books or the luxury of just sitting for hours and reading books. But, I do remember my father staying up very late at night, every night, reading the newspaper from cover to cover...They did take time to read fairy tales [to us], 'cuentos', and books we brought from elementary school, textbooks and school library books."

Malana, an Hispanic woman in her 40s also from an urban background, wrote of rich experiences her family provided her

that influenced her developing literacies:

> "Influenced by the deaconess of our church, my father spared no expense in raising quality children. We had books of all kinds, music lessons, newspapers, magazines; we were active in clubs and organizations, anything that would expose us to the outside world. Once, when I was about eight or ten, he even invited some Black Muslims who were visiting the neighborhood into our living room to express their views. In exchange for this wealth of knowledge we were required to do little more than learn and become good citizens."

Hence, development of literacies was different for both male and female Hispanics when raised in either a rural or an urban setting. Those from urban backgrounds had more resources for the development of their literacies available to them within their homes than those from rural backgrounds. In these cases, geography interacted with informants' ethnicity as an equally important determiner of opportunity for development of their literacies as their gender.

Family Background or Parenting and Culture as Influences on Gender and the Development of Literacies

Several of the Hispanic females in the class wrote of their experiences growing up female in traditional Hispanic families, and the influence that positioning had on their development as readers, speakers and writers. A theme of family protection emerged across their thought papers. This theme was evident, however, in European American females' thought papers as well. The theme of parent protection appeared in two Hispanic females' thought papers on diversity and multiculturalism, but also appeared in two European American females' thought papers on self

and identity. The theme of protection by family did not appear in the male's papers. This theme is best exemplified by the following case excerpts.

Sheila, a Chicana high school reading teacher in her 40s from an urban background, wrote of the influence of her family's protection (which she characterized as traditional Hispanic) on her literacy development:

> "The impact that my Hispanic culture had on my gender and expectations is that as a kid up to about 20 years old, is that my comings and goings were very closely and restrictively monitored. Even living in the dorms was not allowed during my college years because nice, respectable young Chicanas did not live or move out of their family home to go out and live a single's life...Thinking back, perhaps because my activities were restricted, made for me to read alot when at home and to do well academically in high school."

Malana reiterated and expanded this theme of her Hispanic family's protection as an influence on her and her sisters' literacy development and educational opportunity:

> "My mother might think that women should be seen and not heard for their own protection, but my father definitely did not. My sisters and I were taught to believe that our opinions mattered, and that we were not required to tolerate anyone's attempts to demean or belittle us, no matter what the consequences...Although my father was quite liberal in educational matters, he tended to be quite traditional in other matters. My oldest sister, for example, had to give up a Fulbright scholarship to Mexico because she refused to accept it under my father's conditions, which included taking our Great Aunt Kate, the queen of cultural assimilation, with her. My father's precautions to our physical safety were never discussed, but my sisters and I have decided that they stemmed from the old belief that women are in more moral danger than men. My dad used to say that it was not that he didn't trust us, but that he had no faith in others."

Like Malana, two European American females in the course also wrote of the influence of being sheltered or protected on their literacy development. One female in her mid-40s, now a high school media specialist, wrote of her early experience as a nun. The Roman Catholic Church became her family, a patriarchal family who censored her reading:

> "Although the lack of real voice in the political arena was frustrating, the lack of voice in the Catholic Church was more hurtful because I was a nun in a monastery from the age of 18 until I was 23. All of the business of nuns was managed by men - - even to the point of having to get permission from men to engage in activities such as going to school and reading secular literature. This experience was very contrary to my experience at home and at school where my voice was important. The Church today is still entrenched in patriarchal hierarchy. Two years ago, the bishops voted against gender neutral language in future encyclicals and church documents. I also agree with the claim in Mega-Trends for Women that the Church has suppressed archaeological evidence that women were priests in the early church."

Discussion

Data from this study reveal two types of context (geography, and parenting or family background) as influences on gender in the development of literacies. These represent new and specified indicators of the influences that can compose contextual conditions that impact gender in reading, writing, and orality. The next study compliments and expands on the construct of context by identifying and describing other interwoven influences with gender and how these variables impacted the development of other participant's literacies.

Study Two: Influences of Biological Sex, Age, and Generation on Gender and the Development of Literacies

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The second study was conducted by a participant in the first section of the Gender, Culture, and Literacy course. Margaret Gritsavage examined language processes in and written products of the course, as well as participants' reactions. The purpose of her inquiry was to identify additional influences on gender and culture in the development of literacies (Gritsavage, 1997).

Sample

Informant participants were seven graduate students, four of whom were females, ages 29,32,40, and 57. The three male students' ages were 35,40, and 52. The 40 year-old male was African American; the others were European Americans.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were triangulated by gathering multiple forms of data. Data included students' thought papers and course projects. Class discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed to written record. In addition, semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews were conducted with each class member. Participants were also asked to complete a questionnaire that assessed demographic information, and called for elaboration on some course themes, and gathered reactions to the course.

These data were analyzed by constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Informants' responses in interview questions were compared to their reflections on their questionnaires and their thought papers. These were then compared for patterns against informants' discourse patterns and verbalized perceptions.

Multiple frameworks were used for analysis, including social constructivism which emphasizes language as a set of fluid strategies for negotiating social interactions (Crawford, 1988). Additional frameworks included feminist teaching philosophy (Meyer & Fowler, 1993), which allows for the individual's self-exploration, and sociolinguistics (West & Zimmerman, 1987) which stresses the importance of context and how language is used, and discourse analysis (Swann, 1988) which examines the patterns of tacit language conventions.

Findings

Students' perceptions about gender, and about self and identity, varied by the biological sex of the informants. Although class members of both sexes defined gender as a social construction determined by societal norms, issues related to gender roles revealed two distinct perspectives. Conflicting feelings about changing gender roles and expectations was a theme for males. Conversely, a desire to broaden those expectations and roles was a theme for the females.

Males and females also responded differently in the task of examining subjectivities and voice, both in terms of emotional engagement, as well as in content. While females tended to be comfortable with this exercise and shared deeply personal feelings and experiences, each of the males commented on how difficult it was to define himself as a man, and none of the males addressed voice.

The two youngest mean addressed the role that their maleness has played in influencing their language. Burt spoke of the influences of growing up poor and African American in an inner-city neighborhood and learning a slang that emphasized the use of expletives and toughness. His comments are evidence of the pressure on males to use expletives as symbols of masculinity and power (de Klerk, 1997). He described working continually as an adult to change his use of language to adapt to the mainstream world which is now his environment. Language was not a vehicle by which Burt commonly expressed his feelings because his maleness "precludes those words."

Female informants' reflections about self and identity were in direct contrast to those views expressed by the males. Females had a clearer sense of themselves as women than males did as men. For example, all of the females agreed that it was a good time to be a woman because of the wider array of life choices available to women. In contrast to the two younger men who addressed their gendered language, it was the two older women who discussed it in their papers. They both stated that their sense of voice was changing, partly because of societal influences and partly because of age and life experiences. The language style to which they were socialized which encouraged being softspoken and ladylike impeded their ability to deliver their message.

These findings were demonstrated in class discussions. An analysis of the patterns of discourse revealed that there were differences between the sexes in opportunity for participation,

and differences among women by age in their participation. Class discussions were dominated by the two older male participants and by the youngest female. The informant who obtained and controlled the floor with the most initiations of topics, number and length of utterances, presentations of self, interruptions, questions, and evaluative or validating statements was the eldest male in the class. The older female students attributed this disparity to their places within generations that were socialized to a model of being ladylike and subordinate.

Discussion

As predicted in the literature, these females had a difficult time overcoming learned behaviors (Crawford, 1995). The older females, due to their generations' philosophy that women should be seen and not heard and that women should be good listeners (Tromel-Plotz, 1985) were not able to gain the floor by interrupting or asserting their voices.

Study Three: Influences of Ethnicity and Culture on the Development of Literacies

The third study was conducted by a member of the second section of the Gender, Culture, and Literacy course. This student, a 23 year-old African American female, chose to investigate language patterns in classroom discussion when classes were composed primarily of African-American students (Kyle, 1997). Her purpose was to determine if the same patterns of male dominance in discussions demonstrated in classes composed

primarily of European Americans (Tannen, 1992) would occur in classes with different racial and ethnic compositions.

Sample

Informants were students in two classes - - one seventh grade and one eighth grade language arts class. The sex and ethnic composition of the students in the seventh grade class was 43% African American female, 43% African American male, 9% Hispanic females and 4% European American males. In the eighth grade class, there were 53% African American females, 32% African American males, 11% Hispanic males and 5% European American males. The classes were housed in a private school, grades 1-10, with an emphasis on academic excellence for at-risk students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Direct observations were made of the two classes for one and a half weeks. Approximately six hours were spent observing in each class. In addition, two semi-structured interviews and several informal interviews were conducted with the teacher and with individual students in each class. During the observations the seventh graders were studying literature (Romeo and Juliet) and the eight graders were engaged in a grammar unit. Data were analyzed by constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings

Two themes emerged from data analysis - - female dominance in class discussions and females' presence of authority. In the both classes, there was a lack of males volunteering to speak, usually speaking only when called on by the teacher. One of the

female students in the literature class reported this lack of male voice as typical:

> "Sometimes it's like I try not to answer too many questions because I don't want to seem like I'm the only one talking. The females answer all the questions because the males don't participate unless somebody says something really outrageous that they don't agree with."

The teacher, Mrs. K., also confirmed a lack of male voice in class discussions:

> "The guys are very capable of expressing themselves, but I have to pull things out of them."

Mrs. K did see balancing voice in class discussions as a problem:

> "The Black female students I teach are very expressive. They have a dominating personality. The entire group takes on that personality in class. I personally find that detrimental to learning...I think it hurts them in relationships. They try to have too much control over the male which eventually may drive him away."

An interview with two female African-American students in the grammar class confirmed the female's willing participation, and the males' reluctance in class discussions:

> Interviewer: "How do you feel when you answer questions in class?"
> Andrea: "Comfortable. It's o.k. Sometimes it gets a little rowdy."
> Interviewer: "Who gets rowdy?"
> Andrea: "Mostly the girls."
> Tammy: "I feel comfortable. But depending on the subject matter, some people don't listen, but I don't care cause if I feel a certain way bout something I gonna say what I feel."
> Interviewer: "How do the male students react when you express your opinion?"
> Andrea: "Sometimes they ignore me. Sometimes they're o.k. Otherwise, they agree depending on the subject matter. If they don't agree, the guys get loud. They get into arguments with the females. The females, we come back at them, though. We're not afraid."

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> Tammy: "Either they won't listen or they'll argue. They'll take it as me telling them a fact rather than an opinion. The guys usually don't participate unless it is controversial or unless they take offense to what we say. If the males are offended, they speak up, but if it is school related, they are usually quiet. As a female, though, I ain't intimidated by them at all. If you come at me, I'm comin' right back at cha."

Females were also given (by the teacher and by fellow students, male and female) roles of authority in the class. For example, males were found to consult with females (who tended to work in collaborative groups) when they had questions rather than ask the teacher. In addition, Mrs. K. appointed females to help males. In one instance, Mrs. K had an African-American female student, Yolanda, go to the board and teach a group of three African-American males. When asked about this practice, Mrs. K responded:

> "Most of these kids come from female dominated households. No father figure. I do this because if I put a male there to teach them, the work most likely will not get done. The males seem to be more respectful to female authority than male authority."

Discussion

Kyle's findings, although based on only a few hours of observation and interview, are consistent with results of other research conducted with African American students in a different content area (Luster, Varelas, Wenzel & Liao, 1997). In this investigation, African American females were found to dominate discussion in an urban sixth-grade science class. These minority girls, more so than boys, were active in collecting the data, making predictions, developing explanations, and working to

understand scientific concepts through verbalizing and writing about science.

Implications

Taken together, these three studies have direct implications for courses in gender and literacies and for research in gender and reading, writing, and orality. First, we are struck by the range of influences that count as context in determining the development and practice of literacies. Their themes reflect those ideas just beginning to be identified by feminist linguists or sociolinguists (e.g., Bervall, Bing & Freed, 1997). Participants' reflections on the influences on their literacy development have contributed to the "considerable evidence that variables such as race, social class, culture, discourse function, and setting are as important as gender and not additive or easily separated" (Bing & Bergvall, p. 5). It seems that a more inclusive and appropriate title for the course is "Femininities, Masculinities, and Literacies." That title alludes to the notion that binary distinctions, like "men's talk and women's talk", or "men's reading and women's reading", are misleading and incomplete.

Second, it appears that the multiple layers people possess and are positioned by are impossible to partial out. Participants' thought papers, projects, and class discussions show that simplistic categories, like "women", "Hispanic women", "women's reading", or even "Hispanic women's reading" are not informative or accurate. Hence, to examine only gender as an

reading, writing, or speaking will lead only to a partial (and perhaps distorted) picture into the complexities and idiosyncracies that determine the development and practice of those literacies. Moreover, even two seemingly important influences (like culture and gender) are not enough to consider together. Rather, investigators will need to turn their attention to identifying and describing the plethora of influences (like the ones described here) that interact with gender to impact reading and writing, as well as speaking. By doing so, the community of literacy educators will have a more insightful picture of the complex nature of literacies in development and practice.

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